

NEWS and views

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Simcoe County Historical Association

Vol. 36, No. 4

ISSN 0700-4427

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SCHA technical difficulties

Six years ago, your SCHA executive applied for and received an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to enable us to purchase a wonderful Dell computer, printer, and the QuarkXPress publishing program. All of this has helped us immeasurably in the production of *News and Views* as well as our regular correspondence.

Well, the life of a computer is short. This fall, after a major meltdown, which inspired your editor to a flurry of backup activities, the reality of the need for a hardware upgrade developed from a future plan to an immediate necessity. If there are a few errors in this copy, I ask for your patience. The screen developed pink lines a few days ago, and with the January sales around the corner, I decided to tough it out through this issue.

This brings me to the real reason for

this piece. As you know, it is time for your membership renewal. With the changes in charitable tax laws, you now receive a receipt for the entire amount of your \$12 or \$15 cost plus any additional donation. In an attempt to offset the approximately \$1200 cost of the new computer, we are asking you to consider including an extra \$5 or \$10 with your membership fee this year.

We know that times are tough, and the SCHA itself is facing a cut of 1/3 to 2/3 of our grant from Simcoe County. As well, our provincial grant has been extremely slow in arriving, making budget planning interesting.

We thank you for your continued support of this, your local historical association. We hope that you continue to enjoy this publication, and the spring meetings noted below.

Have a very Happy New Year, and we hope your Christmas was merry!

Visit our Website
www.simcoecountyhistory.ca

SCHA
 Preserving the Past,
 in the Present,
 for the Future.

SCHA 2008 Schedule – we will meet at the Simcoe Country Museum, Midhurst

- March 19 – **Gwen Patterson**, tales of the Drummond Islanders: their storied lives in Penetanguishene – 7:30 p.m.
- April – The Ontario Historical Society Accessible Heritage Tool Kit presentation with **Rob Leverty** – date and time TBA in March issue
- May 19 – Annual General Meeting and Dinner – venue TBA

History Comes Alive

by Donna Wice

The beam of Joan McLean's smile gives you a hint of the tremendous pleasure and satisfaction she experienced on Friday, November 14th at the launch of her book *Glimpses of Cookstown*. Pictured at right, with Joan seated, are John Arnold, philanthropist and former local Cookstown boy and Donna Wice, project coordinator,

This was a labour of love begun back in the days of Trudeaumania (for you youngsters, that was 40 years ago). In the words of Vincent Van Gogh, "great things are not done by impulse but by a series of small things brought together." How many small things did Joan complete as she gathered information about each and every home and business in the village of Cookstown? How many

trips to the Archives or Registry office or how many hours spent typing did this 87 year old commit to her research endeavour?

In December of 2006, Joan contacted Innisfil Historical Society, requesting our involvement in the



editing, publishing and marketing required to massage a huge amount of historical data and photos into a readable format. I can only say that volunteerism in Innisfil is at an all-time high as volunteers came forward to scan photos, edit material, design the cover, or create the index for over 5000 family names.

By the time you read this article, the 2nd printing of *Glimpses of Cookstown* will be underway, a sign of its great success. To order your copy, call Hank at 436-3476 or visit Will Silk's General Store in Cookstown.

**Preserving the Past,
in the Present,
for the Future.**

SCHA Membership Fees Reminder

Don't forget! It's that time of year again!

Please use the enclosed renewal form and send the appropriate amount to SCHA, Box 144, Barrie, ON L4M 4S9.



The SCHA acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Culture, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the County of Simcoe.



Simcoe County Historical Association Executive

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For Membership Information, contact

Earl Elliott, Membership Chair	734-9808 earl.elliott@rogers.com
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You are invited to submit photos and articles regarding your historical happenings in Simcoe County. Photos will be returned.

Mail to SCHA, Box 144, Barrie, ON L4M 4S9.

**Deadline for the
next issue is
February 25, 2009**

Settlers' Day 2008

by Deborah Crawford

September 19-21, Penetanguishene Centennial Museum and Archives 2008 Settlers' Day celebration, differed from previous years in that we celebrated an entire group of early settlers to commemorate the 180th anniversary of the Drummond Island Migration. And what a weekend it was!

The first official event of the weekend was an informal meet and greet at the Penetanguishene Legion. Over 100 old friends and new enjoyed the musical entertainment of a local balladeer, a light lunch catered by the always smiling ladies of the Legion and a chance for the hard working committee to relax (for a minute) before the busy Saturday commenced. In the meantime, Survival In the Bush, an A-1 group who not only teach survival and other relevant courses, but also provide authentic voyageur lifestyle displays, had arrived at the museum to set up their display.

Saturday dawned sunny and warm; we couldn't have ordered better weather. Inside the museum, the Great Hall was buzzing with eager family historians who had set up numerous tables highlighting local family histories and genealogies. This proved to be a very popular spot to be. At any given time, the room was alive with numerous folks happily sharing their stories.

Also, on display for the first time anywhere was a rare collection of antique Indian beadwork; the proud owner of this display inherited the collection from her grandfather, who started his collection decades ago. Support from the community was incredible; people were arriving on

the grounds of the museum even before we opened!

Through the day we had musical entertainment outside, amazing story teller John Leclair privileged us with two performances, the friends of the museum grilled delicious lunchtime offerings non-stop; many guests took advantage of the perfect weather and wandered off into town, armed with our customized walking tour map.



Saturday evening our sold-out grand banquet was the place to be, with one of the evening's highlights, our guest speaker, Mr. John Bentley Mays, author of *Arrivals: stories from the history of Ontario*. Descendants were thrilled to hear their story interpreted through his words.

Sunday was another picture perfect day. Discovery Harbour opened for a special tour exclusively for our group and those who attended were thrilled to tour the Officers' Quarters, the Keating House and the grounds. Back at the museum, the research room was full; the volunteers were kept hopping pointing out baptisms,

marriages and other records to eager researchers. All in all, the weekend was a roaring success. Guests came from as far away as Port Alberni, B.C., California in the U.S.A. and all points in between, and as close as around the corner. Next year, the focus once again will return to one family, that of A.A. Thompson, Penetanguishene's first mayor. We hope to see you there.



Strange Brew: Honey and Oil

Local History by Allan Stacey

The 1881 Canada Census for Tecumseth, Simcoe County South, contains the name of a 45-year old man whose occupation was listed as “Bee King”. This individual was David Allanson Jones.

Jones was born at Ringwood near Stouffville, Ontario in 1836 and after spending his youth on his father’s farm went off to try his luck in Illinois. There he tried farming, and later, training dogs and horses. When these two activities failed, he began selling books and fruit trees, earning enough money to return to Canada in 1864. He went into partnership in a general store in Clarksville (later Beeton) with his brother Lyman Melvin Jones.

Lyman Jones withdrew as business partner, leaving Jones to eventually start a company known as D.A. Jones, Ltd.. By 1870, Jones had become interested in beekeeping. The vigor with which he pursued this activity is reflected in the fact that five years later the village of Clarksville was re-named Beeton in honour of the Bee King.

In the early 1880s, Jones involved himself in a venture that would prove to result in a short-lived flurry of excitement in the area. Although reports are sketchy, it appears that during the summer of 1880 gas began to escape from the ground in “almost every quarter of the village” of Beeton. Two years later an area newspaper would prematurely scold Beeton for not developing this obvious resource and noting that Beeton could have been one of the “most noted places in the Province.”

However, the folks in Beeton finally roused up and on July 27, 1882 they

held a meeting in the Beeton *Tribune* building to contemplate organizing a company to bore for oil, Jones being appointed chairman. The business of the evening was a firm decision to bore for oil. Four days later, at the Queen’s Hotel, a second meeting was held and after considerable discussion the stock books were opened and business was brisk.

By October of 1882 the new company, The Beeton Oil Company, had awarded the contract for boring to D.A. Jones. The first week of November, 1882, saw the derrick erected and the engine in place.¹

The last week of November, 1882, saw a Mr. Ward, who had twenty years in the oil business, in charge of drilling. By this time the drill had penetrated through clay to a depth of 100 feet. The clay was said to contain an oily substance resembling petroleum. This discovery resulted in a fever pitch in the village with people on every street corner discussing and speculating on the operation.

The actual type of drill used is difficult to determine. In the first newspaper report it is described as an auger, but a later newspaper report throws doubt on this. Mr. Ward described the ground as a “soft soap-clay”, and verified that this and the previous fifty feet of “soap-stone” were very similar to that at Petrolia. The area around Petrolia in southwestern Ontario was the site of Canada’s first commercial oil industry beginning in the late 1850s.²

By the middle of December the well had only progressed another 35 feet where rock was struck. The drillers were having a number of problems.

In another telling technical detail, it was noted that a lot of water and clay was coming in through the wooden piping, indicating that the drill-hole may have had some form of casing. Casing is common practice in today’s diamond drilling operations when the drill first penetrates any overburden. However, traces of oil kept coming up with the sand pump clearing the hole, causing a local paper to enthuse; “Village lots are being sold every week and it only remains to strike the reservoir of oil below to create a boom in the oil stocks.”

Another problem encountered at this time was a shortage of water to the derrick’s engine. This was solved by digging a ditch from a small creek running through the village. This solution was only temporary as the manager of the village skating rink shut off the water in order to flood his rink. One might wonder how the rink manager had the ability to put the captains of the fledgling oil industry on hold.

On the night of December 18th, disaster struck. While the drillers were working on the derrick, the large sinker and drill, weighing over 1,200 pounds, were suddenly ejected from the now 200 foot deep hole, followed by a gusher of water six inches in diameter. Gas bubbling up with the water was accidentally ignited by a man smoking a pipe, causing a shower of water and burning gas. A Toronto paper remarked: “People are flocking in from the neighboring villages and county to witness this great phenomena.”

By the end of December, business was nearly back to normal, but after

another encounter with water and loss of the casing, drilling on this hole was discontinued. Another hole was started during the first week of March while the first hole continued to flow water. By early April, 1883, the new hole had reached rock at 225 feet and by the end of May was down to 410 feet, the drillers reporting enough signs of oil to keep the stockholders enthusiastic. In the meantime the former hole still continued to gush water and gas. By mid-June the hole had reached the contracted depth of 500 feet. The Company thought that another 300 to 500 feet would put them in the oil. Subsequently, another meeting of the main stockholders was held and it was decided the hole should be continued to 1,000 feet, requiring another \$1,000 which was immediately pledged.

With finances in order, drilling resumed. By the last week of June, the hole was at 570 feet; by the last week of July at 700 feet and by early August was down to 830 feet. Results were still discouraging, but a new twist had entered the picture. The drill hole had passed through rock that was increasingly bluish in color, said to be a sure sign that salt beds must be close. As well, another drill operator began work on the hole and was said to have had considerable experience in boring salt wells.

By the end of August, 1883, the hole had reached a depth of 1,004 feet and newspapers reported that within the last thirty feet, two veins of salt, six to twelve inches thick, were passed through. Exhausted of funds and having reached the contracted depth of 1,000 feet, the Beeton Oil Company stopped work, although

they expected to again try to reach oil in the near future.

David Allanson Jones was not one to sit around and mope after his dreams of becoming an oil baron were dashed. In 1880, while the first whiffs of gas were beginning to waft up from the ground in Beeton, Jones had been overseas searching for new breeds of bees for his beekeeping enterprise.

In late January 1880, Jones had sailed from New York for Cyprus, along with a professor from an American college who conveniently spoke six languages. When Jones returned to Beeton in June of the same year, he had traveled over 3,000 miles in the Middle East. He brought home several hundred queen bees and colonies, mainly from Cyprus, Greece and Jordan. These he hoped to use to improve the breed in Canada. Today one might take a dim view of this practice, as the immigrant bees would be termed an “invasive species”.

Many of these and other hives were shipped to islands in Georgian Bay, to be returned later in the fall. Just slightly south-west of Parry Sound can be found the small islands of Jones and Palestine.

While Jones had been in the Middle East, his name had been added to a long list of incorporators of the Grand Ontario Central Railway Company (Ont. Statutes, 43 Vic. Cap. 55). This was a grand scheme indeed. The standard gauge railway, with all the usual powers of the day, was to run from Goderich to Ottawa. It is quite interesting and telling that most of the route mentions passing through

whole counties in an undefined manner, but does name one town and one village. The town is Peterborough and the village is Beeton, home to two influential signatories. Nothing became of this railway, one of many ventures of the era designed to lighten the budgets and pockets of the municipalities and folks along the intended route. In the meantime, the forty-plus incorporators risked little of their own money, hiding behind the ten-percent call on their share of the stated \$400,000 capitalization.

After the oil boom went bust, Jones busied himself with several endeavors relating to his bee-keeping business.

During the fall of 1880, he had rallied other apiarists to form the Beekeepers Association, of which he was elected president. During the Toronto Industrial Exhibition of that year he exhibited honey made from his “foreign” bees and sold queens for \$7 to \$12 apiece, a princely sum for the day. During this period a newspaper reported that Jones annual production was 75,000 pounds.

1 In that era virtually everything industrial was powered by a vertical or horizontal boiler supplying steam to a stationary steam engine. The reciprocating piston of the steam engine would connect through a connecting rod to a shaft with a flywheel and a pulley. A flat belt would usually drive some other piece of equipment. A small pump, usually also driven by steam, would provide water for the boiler.

2 For more on the discovery and development of Canada's first petroleum industry see: Hope Morritt, *Rivers of Oil*, Quarry Press, 1993.

The editor thanks Mr. Stacey for providing this article. The remainder of the piece will appear in the March issue of News and Views.

Stay tuned!

Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society

by Helen Yielding

Something to Celebrate

History, heritage and happenstance came together recently in the village of Bond Head and the Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society heard how this came about at their September meeting.

The Bond Head Anglican Church, also known as the Osler Church, has a rich and significant history. Founded in 1829 by the Reverend Featherstone Osler, father of Canada's eminent doctor, Sir William Osler, this historic building was recently closed and up for sale. The heritage or legacy of its existence was in danger of being lost. By happenstance a religious group, St. Catherine of Alexandria Ukrainian Catholic Church, was seeking a building for their parish serving Newmarket, Bradford and Aurora. Their purchase of the Osler Church guarantees that this landmark building will continue to serve the religious needs of local people and be treasured for its history and importance in Ontario's past.

Monsignor Conrad Duchak, pastor for the new congregation, invited the Historical Society to this former Anglican church and gave a brief history of his church's beginnings and how he came to purchase this building. His plans for the future were quite exciting and will involve the local community.

Dr. Neil Watters has always had a special interest in William Osler who revolutionized medical history and patient care in Canada, U.S.A. and England at the beginning of the 20th century. On a personal note, Watters' mother, a nurse, was trained in the methods that Osler established. Dr.

Watters presented a brief history of Osler's family and outlined his outstanding contribution to the development of modern medical practice. Father Conrad was delighted to receive a medical book from Watters' personal library.

Lastly, Dave Chambers led the Society members through an architectural tour of the church pointing out the hand-hewn pews, the organ loft and the original front doors. He noted that the first church was a frame building moved from its original location on the 7th line to Bond Head in 1875 on log rollers and bricked over. Original beams can still be seen as well as a plaque commemorating the Oslers. Indeed it was a meeting where past, present and future came together.

Underground Railway Success Story

Stories with happy endings are always a treat to hear and the members of the Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society heard an extraordinary story of an ordinary man from 1851 at their October meeting.

Historian, Hilary Dawson, who is a researcher of local history at Montgomery's Inn in Etobicoke, told the tale of a slave, Joshua Glover, who was sold in 1852 in St. Louis for \$1000. When Joshua escaped and sought freedom in Illinois, he was subject to the Fugitive Slave Law that entitled the owner or, indeed anyone, to capture and return a fugitive slave to his master. This injustice was a major political issue in 1851 and the outcome of Joshua's trial represented a major development in American judicial history: States' rights vs. Federal rights.

Joshua eventually sought freedom in Canada and settled in Lambton Mills, where he lived and worked for the Montgomery family, owners of a prosperous inn, now a historic landmark. He died at age 81, probably unaware that his life experiences helped to polarize opinions in the U.S.A. that led to the Civil War there. And, thanks to Hilary Dawson's keen interest in our past, this remarkable story, illustrated with slides, made for a fascinating evening of local and international history, one with a happy ending.

My Story: A Remembrance Day Memoir

The power of a story, especially when that story is personal, meaningful and memorable, was demonstrated at the Tecumseth and West Gwillimbury Historical Society's November meeting.

Dr. Jim McPhee is a practising physician, now living in Richmond Hill. With dignity, understatement and honesty he related his experiences from WWII to his spellbound audience. Yet, until his grandson asked about his war service, Dr. McPhee had been reluctant to share his story. Even now, this story continues in a most positive way, almost full circle.

At the age of 18, Jim McPhee enlisted in the Canadian Air Force and trained as an air gunner. On his first mission he and his crew were shot down over Germany. His parachute caught on the roof of a farmhouse and, shortly after, he was captured by the Germans. Sent to a prisoner of war camp, he, along with others, endured terrible privations in conditions where hunger, cold,

TecWeGwil

continued

interrogation and forced marches were routine happenings. Eventually he escaped and found his way to an American base and thence to England and home to Canada where, postwar, he trained in medicine and practiced in King City and Richmond Hill.

But his story did not end there. Years later, the son of a crewmember contacted Dr. McPhee to learn something of his dad, whom he had never seen. Then, an earthquake in Germany unearthed the engine of the downed bomber. The citizens of the nearby village tracked down Dr. McPhee to learn more of their own history. He obliged by visiting their village. Imagine his surprise when he was presented with a handkerchief made from a piece of his parachute! And, in 2007 there was a happy reunion of some Germans and Allies with Dr. McPhee and his relatives here in Canada. What a powerful, engaging story, never to be forgotten! Thank you Dr. McPhee.

Local History Gems Preserved

The building boom in Collingwood has reached huge proportions in recent years and a quick tour around town is all one needs to confirm the statistics. Where cornfields and grassland once stretched against the skyline, mushrooming developments can be seen pushing into the horizon in all directions.

As rural Ontario moves toward a changing landscape, heritage preservation becomes an urgent concern. But heritage goes beyond bricks and mortar. A local author has tapped this town's richest resource to safeguard hidden treasures: the stories of its people.

In *Butchers, Bakers and Building the Lakers: Voices of Collingwood*, released in Collingwood this fall, author Christine Cowley distills the stories of generations of Collingwood residents and combines it with historical research for a richly presented oral/pictorial history spanning more than 150 years—just in time to mark

The Andrew Hunter Award 2009

The Andrew Hunter Award is offered annually for historical research on Simcoe County, Ontario, written by an undergraduate student for a course in any university or college. In this sixth year of competition, we look forward to receiving many worthy entries for each of the two awards being offered.

Conditions: The entry shall be an essay between 3,000 and 5,000 words in length or a fourth year undergraduate thesis paper (no length restriction) on some aspect of the history of Simcoe County, Ontario, written in English or in French. The author must have been a part-time or full-time undergraduate student in a degree program at an accredited university or college at the time of writing. The essay must have been written to meet the requirement of an undergraduate credit course during the 2008-2009 academic year. The thesis paper must have been submitted for grading in the 2007-2008 academic year. Entries become the property of the



Simcoe County Historical Association and may be published as part of an essay collection.

Submissions: Essay entries shall be postmarked by April 7, 2009 and undergraduate theses shall be postmarked by January 31, 2009. Submissions will not be returned to the contestants. Papers must be typed in Times New Roman 12 point font, double spaced, and should not bear the instructor's comments or grade. Three copies must be provided. A cover sheet must list the author's name, address, phone number, year of study, school affiliation and department, and the name of the instructor for whom the paper was written.

Entries should be sent to:

The Corresponding Secretary
Simcoe County Historical Association
P.O. Box 144, Barrie, ON L4M 4S9

Adjudication: Entries will be judged by a distinguished panel appointed by the Simcoe County Historical Association. The winners will be announced in early May 2009 with the presentation of the awards to take place at the Annual General Meeting of the Association.

Awards: There will be two awards offered in Canadian funds, one for \$500 for the best undergraduate essay and one for \$500 for the best undergraduate thesis. The Simcoe County Historical Association may edit the winning entries for the purpose of publication.

The Simcoe County Historical Association is under no obligation to grant the awards. For more information, see www.simcoecountyhistory.ca.

the town's sesquicentennial anniversary. With nearly 500 images, mostly from private collections, the book provides more than just fascinating stories: maps, memorabilia and hundreds of unpublished photographs fill over 350

pages. A thorough index, endnotes and bibliography make it an ideal research tool for genealogists and local history buffs.

Get a sneak peek at www.lifegemsbio.com.

COMING EVENTS

of our Member Societies

Alliston Historical Society – contact Jackie Baillie 705-435-5626 or cknowles@rogers.com

Meet at Museum on the Boyne, Fletcher Cres., Alliston every 2nd Wednesday except July, Aug. & Dec. – 7:30 p.m.

Barrie Historical Association – contact Val Brucker

Meet at Barrie City Hall – 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 8 – Show and Tell

Mar. 12 – TBA

Collingwood District Historical Society – contact Joan Miller

www.historicallyspeakingcdhs.ca

Jan. 12 – AGM and Carole Stuart – Made in Collingwood: History and Business at the end of the 19th Century

Essa Historical Society – contact Olive Lee

Meet at Thornton Library – 1:30 p.m.

Jan. 24 – Annual Reports and Show & Tell

Feb. 28 – Janie Cooper-Wilson – Celebrating Black History Month

Mar. 28 – Brian Baker – Trains

Genealogical Society

Meet at Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

79 Ferris Lane, Barrie – 2:00 p.m.

www.simcoebogs.com

Huron Museum Huron Ouendat Village

549 Little Lake Park Road, Midland – Call 526-2844

www.huroniamuseum.com

Innisfil Historical Society – contact Ross Wallace

Meet at Knock Community Centre, 10th SR at 9th Line, Innisfil – 2:00 p.m.

www.innisfilhistorical.ca

Jan. 17 – Show and Tell

Midhurst Historical Society – contact Alice Mitchell 721-7553

Meet at the Library, Finlay Mill Road 7:30 p.m.

Museum on the Boyne – contact Rachelle Clayton

250 Fletcher Crescent in Riverdale Park, Alliston – Call 435-0167

www.allistonontario.com/MuseumonthetheBoyne.html

Orillia Museum of Art and History – contact Gloria Taylor, curator

30 Peter Street South, Orillia – Call 326-2159 www.orilliamuseum.org

to Jan. 5 – Celebrating Photography: Works of the Orillia and District Camera Club

History Speaker Series – contact Ross Wallace

Meet at St. Paul's United Church, Peter St. and Coldwater Rd., Orillia – 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 10 – Sir John A. Macdonald Dinner, sold out

Jan. 21 – A debate regarding changing the name of Queen Victoria Day to Sir John A. Macdonald Day

Penetanguishene Centennial Museum and Archives

13 Burke St. at Beck Blvd. Call 549-2150

www.pencenmuseum.com

Feb. 20-22 – Winterama

Apr. 4 – Easter Eggstravaganza

Simcoe County Museum

1151 Highway 26, Midhurst – Call 728-3721

Dec. 29-30, Jan. 2-4 – Winter Fun Guided Tours, Victorian Tea and Activities – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Stayner Heritage Society – contact Dorothy Millsap

Centennial United Church (corner of Oak and William Streets) – 7:30pm.

www.staynerheritagesociety.com

Tecumseth & West Gwillimbury Historical Society – contact Helen Yielding

Meet at Tec We Gwill Hall, Newton Robinson, 7:30 p.m.

<http://www.ntpl.ca/twghhistoricalsoc.htm>

Call 905-775-7144 or 905-936-3659

Jan. 19 – Show and Tell

Don't forget to have your events coordinator forward your calendar for inclusion on this page. Just email it to mark.jill@sympatico.ca or mail it to the SCHA postal box.

Thanks! Jill Hynes, Editor

Happy New Year

from the

SCHA

Preserving the Past,
in the Present,
for the Future.